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SUBJECT: Leaders to Watch: Guangdong's Rising Political Stars

¶1. SUMMARY: By the end of the current term in 2013, the governor of Guangdong Province and six of eight vice governors will leave office. In the selection of the next generation of leaders, experience in the Communist Youth League (CYL) and membership in the powerful local Hakka community will likely continue to be major advantages. Guangzhou Party Secretary Zhu Xiaodan, junior-most Vice Governor Wan Qingliang, Liu Zhigeng, Zhu Zejun, and Huang Yebin are all people to watch, as are Deng Haiguang and Li Jia. END SUMMARY.

Seven High-Level Openings in Next Five Years

¶2. By the next term of the Guangdong Provincial Government, which will begin in 2013, Governor Huang Huahua and six vice governors will vacate their seats due to term limits or the mandatory retirement age. Huang and five of eight vice governors have a background in the China Youth League, a power base of President Hu Jintao. If this trend continues as expected, CYL experience will be an important factor in the selection of new leaders. Similarly, the Hakka community in Guangdong remains politically influential, giving ethnic Hakka candidates an additional leg up on their non-Hakka competitors. Though neither CYL experience nor Hakka ethnicity are prerequisites for advancement in Guangdong, they might propel certain individuals past equally well-qualified colleagues, and thus remain useful criteria for assessing the career potential of government and Party officials here.

Whose Star will Shine? Greater Lights

¶3. Zhu Xiaodan, 56, Guangzhou Party secretary since 2006 and member of the Guangdong Communist Party Standing Committee, will be a strong competitor for the governorship. One senior Party officer at a government think tank said he would "not be surprised" if Zhu advanced to the Politburo in the future. Huang Huahua will vacate his position as governor by 2013, if not sooner, and Zhu is a player in the province's power politics. He has good CYL ties, having served 1971-1987 in various CYL positions, including as the organization's municipal Party secretary. He gained administrative experience as Party secretary of Guangzhou's Conghua County 1981-1991. Within the Guangzhou Communist Party, where Zhu served 1991-2002, he filled jobs that included deputy secretary general, Standing Committee member, director general of propaganda and deputy Party secretary. Zhu subsequently served as deputy director general and then director general of the United Front while also filling a vice chairmanship of the Guangdong People's Consultative Conference. Zhu was promoted to Standing Committee member and director general for propaganda, positions he held until assuming his current duties.

14. Wan Qingliang, who at 45 is one of the youngest Guangdong vice governors and one of the best spoken, has an excellent background for becoming a future governor of the province. Wan served as Party secretary for the Guangdong CYL 2000-2003 and is Hakka, to boot. Due largely to his relative youth, Wan might need to serve one more term as vice governor before competing seriously for governor, the highest position to which he could aspire in his native province.

15. Liu Zhigeng, 53, a Hakka and Party secretary of Dongguan, likely has hopes of following the pattern set by his predecessors; Dongguan's three most recent principal officers have been promoted, including current vice governor Tong Xing. During the most recent CPC Plenum, Governor Huang Huahua attended Dongguan's group discussion sessions -- one factor believed by some to indicate Huang's support of Liu.

16. Zhu Zejun's tenure as Party secretary of Guangzhou's Zengcheng City has been highlighted by his implementation of a county-wide zoning scheme ultimately adopted by the provincial government. The program designates areas for ecological protection in addition to the normal zones for residential and industrial use; Zhu is particularly proud of how well he has been able to divide the land mass of Zengcheng and, in the process, have government leaders visit the city to laud his bold urban blueprint. Among county-level officials in China, Zhu is one of the most frequently quoted in the People's Daily and its subordinate publications. On the opening day of the most recent provincial Party Plenum, Zhu was one of the few Guangzhou officials interviewed by Guangdong Television. Zhu, who is 54, previously worked in the executive office of the Guangdong Communist Party Committee.

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17. Huang Yebin, 52, currently serves as Huizhou Municipality Party secretary. Huizhou has been chosen to pilot a number of recent reform programs, including rural residential property registration reform and a more comprehensive supervision mechanism for party members. It has served as a pilot city for implementing "scientific development," the current buzzword in south China. Moreover, Huizhou has been one of two Pearl River Delta (PRD) cities picked to experiment with urban and social integration. Huang's prior experience as deputy director general of the Guangdong Development and Reform Commission makes him a natural choice to lead these trials.

And Lesser Lights

18. Deng Haiguang, 41, is the current mayor of Maoming Municipality and a Standing Committee member of the Guangdong People's Congress. He was the successor to Wan Qingliang in the Guangdong CYL, serving as the organization's Party secretary 2003-2007. Maoming provides Deng with a proven platform, but it is unclear whether he will be able to take advantage of it.

19. Li Jia, 45, currently serves as mayor of the Hakka area of the Meizhou Municipality. Li worked in the CYL 1987-2001, first at Sun Yat-sen University's CYL and later at the provincial CYL, where he rose to be the organization's deputy Party secretary and where he served with Wan Qingliang (see above). Li has three years of experience on the Standing Committee of the Guangdong People's Political Consultative Conference.

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